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In 2010, I found myself unemployed due to an injury to my hand. I would lose hold of things end up dropping plates, drinks, trays, whatever I was holding. Then being afraid I was going to drop something was causing panic attacks, which caused me to drop more things and eventually I lost my job. Eventually I couldn't grip anything in my hand and it hurt so bad. I couldn't prove that it was work related and I didn't have insurance, so it wasn't long I didn't have a home anymore because I didn't have a job. But now I can get basic Medicaid with a HMK qualifying child.

Medicaid kicked in, I found a primary care provider I liked, I was able to see a doctor for an MRI. I got two screws to secure the tendon back to the wrist bone, I could use my hand again after 6 weeks in a cast. I was able to get treated for a digestive disorder that is now healed. And when I thought I was going crazy the doctor reassured me it was PTSD and the symptoms are treatable.

During the down time I was in a cast it was advised that I think about another line of work because I wouldn't be able to work in food service as a waitress for long before the rest of the hand began to fall apart. I knew in my heart the only way out of poverty would be through college. So I enrolled at College of Great Falls.

With all the normal chaos in my life and then added stress of starting college I was struggling with PTSD and I needed therapy to help me live with all that comes with PTSD if I was ever going to make down this new journey in my life. What I would learn is that it takes a lot of therapy to get to a place where I could live functionally with my random self.

In 2012, I had finished my first semester when I was offered a part time job registering voters in Great Falls. It was part time and would help pay the bills, so I took it. Then came the news that I would lose the coverage that I had become dependent on. Life without Medicaid meant that I didn't have a life line. How was

I going to pay for my meds? How was I going to get mental health care? What if I have an accident.

For 9 months I stretched out some med and gave up the more expensive ones because they cost too much. And when I needed mental health I had to resort to drop in centers and be subject to long waits with 10 or 15 others. I would find myself crying my eyes out for no reason. There were some days when I couldn't leave my house to go to school. I was emotionally exhausted, overwhelmed with anxiety from worrying and literally making life more chaotic. Finally, if that wasn't enough, fall registration requirement included health insurance (which I didn't have) or you had to opt in to special prepaid offer from Blue Cross Blue Shield for only \$1,000 student loan dollars.

Then comes this idea that we could open up Montana's Medicaid program to all low income, children and adult Montanans while raising the income limits and let the Federal government fund nearly all of it. Why had we not done this already? I never really understood why you got Medicaid if you had a kid and not if you didn't.

So begins this 6 ½ year long conversation that brings us here today... Is Medicaid expansion a good deal for Montana? My sister, Brenda, and I spent the summer talking to our friends and neighbors about Medicaid expansion and what that would look like. We met so many people and shared just as many stories. I'll share some stories as we go if time allows. We talked to low-income uninsured Montanans at the markets, the food banks, the county fairs, and heard much of the same thing... If I could just get help with this one thing then I could do better with these other things.

If I could just get my medications regularly, if I could only get in see the doctor on time, if I could only get help for my (you can put what ever ailment you want here) ... and then I would call in less, get up on time, etc. Like Rebecca...

Rebecca is a 49-year-old, now retired house keeper who has suffered chronic illness her whole life. The discs in her spine were crumbling, she suffered a lot of pain, she was further restricted by respiratory problems that significantly affected her quality of life as well and there was no relief for her because she had no health insurance. The emergency room was her primary care provider and the ambulance was the only way for her to get there for almost 15 years. She

eventually lost her job when she could no longer keep up at work...After Medicaid expansion she has been able to get the treatments she needed and the medications she needed. She got the referral to fuse the discs to relieve much of the pain she suffered so she isn't bed ridden. Just being able to get out bed and move around with little pain is a new chance at living she says. Any day you can get out of bed is a good day.

Last fall I took a service position at the Self Help Law Center in Great Falls and the only thing I had to worry about was finding someone to step into my shoes so that I could leave my family and dogs at home for 5 days because Medicaid expansion had me covered. And thankfully I had it when I needed it before a medical emergency happened. And when I was concerned about some cancer running in the family Medicaid expansion has me covered again and I have peace of mind at the end of the day that if some medical emergency should arise I would get treated and not have debilitating medical debt.

When Tiffany was about 21 she ended up checking into the ER in rural Shelby Montana with stomach pains when they told her she would need to go to great falls to get her appendix out pronto. By the time the ER visit in Shelby, the 100 mile ambulance ride, checking in to the Benefis ER by ambulance, 4am emergency operating room, and three days in the hospital left her with \$40,000 in medical debt which they still garnish her wages 50% every pay check and will for many, many, more years. Last year when Tiffany ended up getting admitted to the hospital for several days Medicaid expansion had her covered and she suffered no new debt.

I cannot come all this way and not talk about how I have seen the expanded dental services and dentures make a difference in lives. It is hard to imagine what it is like to have several broken or decayed teeth at the same time unless you have been there. Mouth pain is brutal and constant. You cannot eat or drink anything too hot or too cold, nothing sweet, or sticky. The cold air from Montana's harsh winters makes it much more painful to go outside when the air gets to you. They get infected and abscessed, they ooze bad stuff, then creates other health risks like malnutrition, blood poisoning, fatigue, ER visits, cat scans, prescriptions, and repeat... because rarely have I or others I know taken care of the bad tooth the first time. For the amount of money that is spent on tooth/

mouth related medical costs the cost of the dentures would save money in the long run.

Amanda was 27 year old mother of four who weighed in a 89 lbs when she got the referral to the surgeon to take out her teeth and then denture to follow. Once her mouth healed she was able to eat better so she ate better food, she gained a little weight, then she quit smoking cigarettes. Now she is 125 lbs, tending to her own mental health needs, going to church and who knows how far she will go, but her life has totally been transformed with just a new set of teeth.

I believe Medicaid expansion is the right thing for Montana and that is what keeps bringing me back to tell my story. That's why Brenda drives 400 miles to attend lobby days and legislative hearings on Medicaid expansion. That's why we come and sit through 9 hour hearings and ask that every story be heard. That is why we called our legislators and hit the streets teaching our neighbors to how to do the same, then having them teach others. And that is why we signed on to collect signature on the initiative in 2014 and a second legislative session in 2015. And that is why I have come today as we prepare for the next session.

Last May i graduated from the University of Great Falls with a BS in Paralegal Studies and Medicaid Expansion played a huge role in that accomplishment. Medicaid In whatever form has made it possible for me to get my hand fixed so that I could go to college and with the very best counseling services available I am here today to share my experiences. It doesn't mean that I don't still have an occasional meltdown at the most inopportune moments, I means I can spot those meltdown moments early and find coping tools to get through. But in all honesty without proper mental health care thing could be very different in my life right now and without the use of my hand I never would have completed 5 years of college.

Melissa